BRITISH COLUMBIA

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For Immediate Release
2006FOR0003-000019
Jan. 19, 2006

Ministry of Forests and Range
Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation

100TH FIRST NATION SIGNS FOREST AGREEMENT WITH PROVINCE

VANCOUVER – The Province has reached a significant milestone in its relationship with First Nations: B.C. has signed forestry agreements with 100 First Nations, Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman and Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Minister Tom Christensen said today.

Coleman and Christensen commented on the progress at a celebration with the Leq'a:mel First Nation, the 100th to sign since the first agreement was reached in 2002.

"Our government is the first in B.C. to share revenue and access to the forests with First Nations, creating more opportunities for First Nations and more certainty and stability for industry," said Coleman. "At first, these benefits were enjoyed locally, but with 100 First Nations reaching agreements, we're starting to see the benefits provincially."

To date, the agreements have provided access to more than 15.7 million cubic metres of timber and shared forestry revenues of almost $115 million. Forestry agreements fulfil the Province's obligation to consult and accommodate First Nations on forest activity in their traditional territory during the five-year term of the agreements. They allow First Nations to develop their own forestry businesses while other local forestry businesses benefit from increased stability and certainty.

"As a result of these agreements, we've seen First Nations build community centres, expand educational opportunities for their young people and even buy a local resort," said Coleman. "These agreements mean more opportunities and a better future for First Nations."

The Leq'a:mel First Nation has negotiated a five-year, $760,000 forest and range agreement that gives the First Nation access to more than 45,000 cubic metres of timber in the Chilliwack Forest District. The Leq'a:mel has 304 members on 10 reserves in the Deroche area, 20 km east of Mission.

"We recognize the potential for building a better relationship with the Province," Chief Susan McKamey said. "This interim agreement will provide economic opportunities as we continue the consultation process to reach a final accommodation of our needs."

The provincial government and First Nations have embarked on developing a new relationship based on mutual respect and the principles of recognition and reconciliation. Forest and range agreements and the economic opportunities they provide are an important part of that endeavour.

"This agreement highlights a significant milestone that has been achieved between our government and First Nations in B.C. It is proof that we can work together to share resources and benefits," said Christensen. "Forestry agreements have resulted in jobs and economic prosperity for Aboriginal communities."

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Over the past four years, the Province has worked with First Nations to provide economic growth and opportunities, particularly in traditional areas such as forestry. Government is committed to strengthening relationships with First Nations based on constructive consultation on social and economic issues.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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